

**TESTIMONY OF
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SUBMITTED TO THE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
Thursday, March 10, 2022**

SB 284, An Act Increasing The Age From Eight To Eighteen Years For An Income-Eligible Person To Obtain Medical Assistance Regardless Of Immigration Status

Building One Community appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 284, An Act Increasing The Age From Eight To Eighteen Years For An Income-Eligible Person To Obtain Medical Assistance Regardless Of Immigration Status.

Senate Bill 284 would build on a 2021 Act which created, within available appropriations and for income-eligible individuals, a state-funded Medicaid program for children under age 9 and women for 12 months after giving birth. It requires the Department of Social Services to amend the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) state plan to provide insurance coverage for prenatal care through the "unborn child option." This program begins January 2023. Under SB 284, coverage under the state-funded Medicaid program would expand to those under age 19. **Building One Community urges the Committee to support SB 284 as it is an important investment in both the care of individuals living in this state, and in public health.**

Building One Community is a nonprofit organization located in Stamford. We are in our 11th year serving as a vital center for immigrant opportunity. Our mission is to advance the successful integration of immigrants and their families. Our vision is one welcoming community in which all immigrants are thriving and contributing members of society. We deliver compassionate services to make all immigrants feel welcome and to enrich the entire community.

Our programs and services are designed to educate, employ, and empower our immigrant families and individuals while engaging the entire community. We have served over 13,000 individuals who come from 112 different countries and speak 43 different languages. Most of our participants are Latinas/Latinos.

As the pandemic hit, we pivoted to providing relief services to our participants. Services we performed during 2020 and 2021 included distributing inclusive information, PPE and test kits. We facilitated 2,182 vaccinations through in-house clinics with Community Health Center, Inc. and the City of Stamford, and through Stamford Health's No Barriers program. It was critical

from a public health perspective to ensure that all our community members received the COVID-19 vaccine, independent of their immigration status. **We saw very plainly that the health status of some of us impacted all of us.**

Our participants were perhaps the most important to vaccinate, and among the least willing and least able to get vaccinated. They were hit the hardest because when community spread of the virus was the most prevalent, our participants were working in essential positions – grocery workers and delivery people, for example. They could not afford to stay home. They also tend to live in crowded living quarters making spread among them more likely. Finally, their fear of interacting with official organizations makes getting health care – including vaccines – challenging. As a result, they got sicker at higher rates and died at higher rates. The disparate impact data in Connecticut and across the country bear out the difficulty these members of our community experienced.

What applies to COVID-19 applies to other public health problems too. It will help the state, our hospitals and clinics if immigrants have access to routine health care and have a sense of trust that they will not be deported or lose their immigration status if they receive care for strep throat or for Tuberculosis, or get preventative screenings like an annual physical. When these members of our community don't have access to preventative care, if they develop serious illnesses their diagnosis will be more severe and likely result in high uncompensated care costs to the public health system with more expensive, complex and less successful outcomes.

We are grateful to the Human Services Committee for raising SB 284 and to the General Assembly for adopting Public Act 21-176. We can tell you first-hand how important this is to the well-being of immigrants.

We strongly believe SB 284, which will expand healthcare coverage for youth, will have lasting improvements in many ways. It addresses a key social determinant of health – access to care. It gives peace of mind to families and presents an opportunity to have a generation grow to trust and connect to organizations that provide healthcare.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. If you would like any further information, I can be reached at abadurina@b1c.org or (203) 674-8585 x104.